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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the International Council of Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals have highlighted issues integral to improving the lives of women and the girl child. One of the most critical of these issues is education.

2. The International Council of Women, in expressing grave concerns about the matters below, asks that serious and particular attention be given to their causes and effects.

Lack of access to adequate basic education for girls

3. The right to an education leading to a basic level of literacy is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Despite these declarations, elementary education is still not universally available to girls.

4. Among the major problems being reported by our members both in developed and developing countries are:

- Girls not being allowed (by their parents) to attend school.
- Girls who go to school being expected to undertake household duties before and after school.
- Girls' domestic duties curtailing their time for homework.
- Parents, including mothers (also uneducated), not appreciating the value of educating girls.
- Poor quality teaching results in girls leaving school unable to read and write. As a consequence, parents fail to see any benefit to the girl, her family or community, in her attendance at school.
- Parents and communities perceiving greater value in selling the girl into forced and early marriage, rather than educating her.
- Girls being denied equal opportunities with boys to prepare them for higher education and pathways to a career.

5. Keeping girls in a state of ignorance has profound effects upon the global community. Study after study has concluded that the advancement of a country is dependent upon the education of its female citizens. Educated girls and women are able to take advantage of programmes designed to assist them; they are better able to support their families and so contribute to the economy of their country.

Access to science, engineering and technology training for girls

6. The International Council of Women notes that the attitude still exists within certain societies that women and girls are not suited for careers in science, engineering and information technology.

7. The Council, however, notes that countries in the Far East continue to experience high demand for workers in technology fields, especially computing. Without access to training in these fields, women and girls are unable to obtain this

* Issued without formal editing.

well-paid employment and look after their families. They are trapped in low paid domestic work which, in turn, keeps their children in poverty.

8. In light of the above, the International Council of Women recommends that Governments be urged to ensure that girls and women have access to good basic education with pathways open to higher education and careers, particularly in the areas of science, engineering and technology and to recognize that progress for women is progress for all.